Chapter 1

Boundary Producing Practices along the North Eastern Frontier of British India

Boundaries are the inevitable product of advancing civilisation; they are human inventions not necessarily supported by nature’s dispositions, and as such they are only of solid value so long as they can be made strong enough and secure enough to prevent their violation and infringement. ¹

Thomas Hungerford Holdich, 1916

Recent studies on borderlands and frontiers underline the significance of examining the nation-state from the border and how the social dynamics of border regions affect the territorialization of states. ² It has also drawn our attention to the processes whereby “borderland lawlessness” or the ambiguous space between state laws often provides fertile ground for activities deemed


"illicit" or "illegal" by states. This body of research has broadened our conceptual understanding on the historical construction of borders and frontiers and the interactions between local peoples and colonial powers at varying levels. At the same time, it is also important to consider the fact that each frontier and borderlands, to borrow Van Schendel and Baud words, have their own specific social dynamics and historical developments, a history which is worth recovering and experiences worth exploring.

This chapter explores colonial boundary-producing practices along British India’s North Eastern Frontier, a region which has almost gone unremarked by many historical works. It attempts to show how colonial bordering practices were closely linked with new forms of territorialising power and forms of spatial discipline, which were aimed to establish control over resources and people. However, as this chapter suggest, this process of territorializing space was also modified by local realities and contestation by the people within these frontier spaces. Following Van Schendel and Baud this chapter will thus draw attention as to "how borderlands have dealt with their states."

Since frontiers are a ‘functioning’ and ‘a symbolic instrument of state control,’ enforced frontiers, as Eric Tagliacozzo argues, are therefore crucial to the logics of rationalized state-making projects often pursued with energy and vigour by area regimes. Along the North Eastern Frontier, the imperial boundary-producing enterprise involved the employment of a broad spectrum of

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initiatives and the formulation of different strategies at different points of time. One colonial strategy in the North Eastern Frontier which crystallised in the 1850s and 60s involved the drawing of lines between the "hills" and the "plains". Instead of being perceived as vital sites of resources, tea, rubber, minerals, and other commodities, which could be drawn upon to consolidate the lowland states, the hills came to be increasingly represented in colonial narratives as spaces of lawlessness or disorder.

Yet, "lawlessness" did not necessarily exhaust the capacity of the state to extract from the hills. In fact, it provided the colonial state a legitimating factor in converting what Timothy Mitchell calls the country's "productive powers" - meaning the local populace and their lands - into pliable and extractive commodities. While the hills-plains distinction emerged as a consequence of the 19th century colonial border-making projects, yet, historians who have explored the colonial construction of this binary opposition between hills and plains may have, as Dolly Kikon points out, tended to overlook the continual importance of connecting spaces such as the foothills as a site for interaction, networks, collaboration and mobility. It is the intention of this chapter to draw attention to the significance of some of these more complex spaces such as the river ways, foothills and duars or passes within the hills-plains opposition.

Colonial border-making strategies could put new pressures on movement and mobility of people along the frontier through practices of documentary control, even as settlement strategies or "ethnic bordering" were being initiated for low cost border control. Even as these colonial practices were being framed, varied institutions such as the police, military, and legal structures, including armed militias, took steps to ensure that the will of the government was exercised on the ground. The policing and regulation of spatial locations by these

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8 See Dolly Kikon, 'Borders, duars and bazaars,' *Biblio*, May-June 2009.
different institutions set in motion a “hardening” of borders along the North-Eastern Frontier. This chapter will thus show how the gradual crystallization of a fiscal, police, and legal regimes in the region were closely intertwined with colonial bordering practices. Examining the progression of state-making in interstitial frontier spaces can, not only expose the differential processes through which “borders” are produced at particular historical moments, it could also provide us a window to examine closely the impact of changing political imperatives and the expansion and contraction of access across frontier areas.

Even so, conflicting approaches within the British Government towards the North Eastern Frontier and local reactions to colonial encroachments, the changing political parameter in the Ava court following the Anglo-Burmese wars to the French intrigues in upper Burma in the late nineteenth century, the “Great India-China Game” in the early twentieth century and the two World Wars would thus come to dictate the pace of spatial transformation along the North-Eastern Frontier. However, we also know that colonial state-making projects often involve substantial risks and uncertain outcomes. Thus, this chapter will also examine the socio-political processes happening on the ground, particularly at the “margins”, where borders were being imposed and contested. For, even as colonial officials were engaged in drawing lines, “fixing” people geographically and containing “unauthorized movements,” people along the frontier either routinely defied or appropriated the states project in their own way to pursue their varied agendas. Through such practices, they often contradicted the presumed intention of the colonial schemes, while causing no small amount of worry to the colonial state.9

9 For example, in the context of Southeast Asia, Reed Wadley has shown how the Ibars along the West Borneo borderlands continued to challenge colonial power by refusing to end their headhunting practices, pay imposed taxes and seek permission to move across the border. See Reed L. Wadley, ‘Trouble on the Frontier: Dutch – Brooke Relations and Iban Rebellion in the West Borneo Borderlands, 1842 – 1886,’ Modern Asian Studies 1,35, 3 (2001).
Whose Frontier?

At the opening of the nineteenth century, a series of frontier frictions along the eastern frontier of Bengal drew the British East India Company (EIC) to a head-on confrontation with the expanding Ava kingdom. Palace intrigues by rival court officials in the Ahom kingdom encouraged the rulers of Ava to intervene and subsequently overrun the territory of Assam in 1817. Elsewhere, the “forcible cutting of timber in the Kubo valley” by the Manipur Raja Marjeet Sing drew down “remonstrance from the Court of Ava”. To add to this growing tension, in 1819, Marjeet Sing (considered one of Ava’s “tributary princess”) declined the Court of Ava’s summon to appear at the coronation of King Bagyidaw (1819 – 37). The Ava court sensing that control over its frontier state was being gradually lost immediately dispatched a contingent of Burmese army into Manipur “to seize the rebel [Raja Marjeet Sing]”. In the ensuing hostility, the invading Burmese army plundered the country, carried off a large number of people as “slave labour” to Ava, while simultaneously making an aggressive push into the British territory of Cachar where the ruling family of Manipur had sought refuge. In the process the fortunes of Manipur and Cachar would get entangled in the first Anglo-Burmese war.

Farther south, the situation in the Chittagong frontier was no less alarming. In the Arakan-Chittagong frontier, the Burmese army pursuing Arakanese “fugitives” soon appeared on the borders of the Company’s

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11 Pemberton, p. 48
12 Prior to this, Manipur had been ravaged twice in 1758 and in 1764 by the Ava King Alaungpaya. During these two invasions, “thousands of people were deported and the valley was left nearly empty for years”, writes Thant Myint-U. “Many of the captives were smiths, weavers and craftsmen of all sorts”, who were settled around the capital Ava and subsequently came to provide special services to the crown and the Burmese nobility. See Thant Myint-U, River of Lost Footsteps: A Personal History of Burma (New York: Faber and Faber, 2007), p. 110. Also see Pemberton, p., 48
In 1823, after seizing the British outpost of Shahpuri, an island on the river Tek Naf, the Burmese Governor at Arakan very soon issued threats to the government of Calcutta to invade and takeover "the cities of Dacca and Moorshedabad". While such intimidation was primarily intended to assert Burmese ascendancy in the region, British strategist in Calcutta knew well the dangers of such a move as it would awkwardly "place the invaders in dangerous proximity to Calcutta." In the eyes of Calcutta officials, the Ava kingdom had then become a potential source of danger to its growing power and commercial interest in the region. Even as the Ava king pushed the kingdom's frontiers further into territories bordering British protectorates such as Cachar, war seemed to become inevitable. The final stroke to an impending first Anglo-Burmese war occurred in January 1824 when Maha Bandula, the celebrated Burmese General began preparations to move into the Company's territory of Chittagong. It was during this moment of imperial tussle over frontier spaces that the mountainous hill tracts along the eastern frontier of Bengal entered the colonial spatial ambit.

By early 1826, the brief border war between Burma and the British EIC was brought to a close with the singing of the Treaty of Yandabo. This Treaty proved to be a watershed for regions along the eastern frontier of Bengal. Under the Treaty, the Ava king not only ceded to the EIC the territory of Assam, Manipur, Jaintia, Arracan, and Tenessarim. It also stipulated the boundary between the two conflicting entities. Thus, Article 3 of the Treaty states:

15 Horace, p. 23
16 See Pemberton, p. and Horace,
To prevent all future disputes respecting the boundary line between the two great nations, the British Government will retain the conquered Provinces of Arracan. The Unnoupectoumien or Arakan Mountains (known in Arakan by the name of the Yeomatoung or Pokhingloung Range) will henceforth form the boundary between the two great Nations on that side. Any doubts regarding the said line of demarcation will be settled by Commissioners appointed by the respective governments.\textsuperscript{17}

While the Treaty may have sanctioned the drawing of boundaries and delineated the sphere of authority between British Bengal and the Burmese, yet, the eventual control of these territories and its human populations would be an exceedingly more complicated exercise. This was especially so, when the British knew next to nothing about the far interior kingdoms and peoples around this region, not to mention the basic geography. As the orientalist Horace Hayman Wilson writes, “The countries lying on the east and south-east of the British frontier of Bengal, from Asam to Arakan, a distance from north to south of about four hundred miles, were almost unknown at this period to European geography.”\textsuperscript{18} Accordingly, a series of initiatives including exploration, mapping and concomitant cataloging of land, resources and territory sought to make scattered ecologies and small societies “legible” to a centralizing state.\textsuperscript{19}

As British agents and representatives fanned out from their frontier stations like Sadiya to pursue the varied imperial agendas, they were met with many surprises about the nuanced and complex political relationship straddling


\textsuperscript{18} Wilson, The History of British India, p. 10

\textsuperscript{19} James C. Scott, Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human conditions have Failed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
the frontier tracts between Assam and Burma. For instance, in the late 1820s, Captain S. F. Hannay of the 40th Regiment, Native Infantry, observed that the Singphos were revenue-paying subjects of the Ava king, “the Beesa Gaum being the collector in Hookung and Gakhen Thao in Assam.” Concomitantly, the chiefs paid occasional visits to Ava, and it was during such events the king conferred on them pompous or high titles. Thus, Hannay writes about “the former Duffa Gam and Beesa Gam [who] had both visited Ava and received high titles, a title also having been sent to Gakhan Thao.” Perhaps it was through such practices the Ava king claimed and asserted his authority over these mountainous territories. Captain Hannay thus remarks how such symbolic investitures have led “the present King of Ava [to] imagine that all the Singphos are his subjects and the lands which they occupy his territory.”

If the Singpho chiefs were crucial mediums in consolidating Ava’s control over dispersed frontier areas, along the Ahom frontier the interaction between the hill people and the lowland regime was defined by a rather loose and flexible political arrangement. Under the Assam Government, Naga chiefs bordering the Sibsagar plains were said to have paid annual visits presenting the Ahom kings with “slaves, elephant teeth, spear shafts, cloths, and cotton & c.” In return, the Naga chiefs “received presents of various kinds on their dismissal.” Captain T. Brodie, Principal Assistant to the Governor General Agent, noted that while the Ahom rulers “considered the offerings of the Naga chiefs as dues.” The hill chiefs treated the exercise “as a mere interchange of presents.” Perhaps, through such strategies valley kingdoms such as the Ahom and the Manipur raj sought to exercise “indirect” control over polities lying outside the core. Besides, such

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20 Foreign Department (hereafter FD), 8 May 1837, Nos. 64 - 66, P.C.
21 Ibid
23 Ibid., p. 287.
exchange practices could also possibly open and sustained channels of communication across boundaries, while ensuring that peace is maintained and sometimes solidarity. Captain Brodie thus notes how, “the Assam Government found it more convenient to conciliate the Nagas by presents than to overawe them by coercion.”

Along side these varied political practices early British officials also recognized the fact that powerful hill communities would often derive remunerations or “tributes” from their lowland neighbors. Thus, in 1840, Lieutenant Grange writes about the “Cacharees” who “have been obliged to pay tribute to the Nagas of Sumoogoding to preserve peace.” Altogether, the tribute “consisted of a cow or bullock and one maund of salt per annum.” For the actors involved, such a transaction constituted a kind of “protection money”, a guarantee that no “raids” would henceforth be carried out on those who paid the “tribute.” Such payments were however not always appreciated. Grange records that the Naga villages of “Kareabonglo”, “Galaga and Harapalo”, stated that they “would rejoice in the subjugation of the Angamees who force them to give them conch shells and other things to purchase the preservation of peace.”

In the case of the Abors who routinely levied “contributions on their low-land and less martial neighbors of Assam,” any delay in the payment was reportedly countered by “predatory incursions” and “carrying off the people prisoners”. Such acts of reprisals sustained the power bases of dominant hill chiefs and ensured the steady flow of human and material resources to the hills.

24 'Reports of Lieutenant Brodie,' p. 287
26 Ibid.
27 Even as late as 1869, the Angamis continued to collect “tributes from Bokolia and Mohedjoo (now Manga), in Karbi Anglong. See Chasie, p. 259.
28 E. R. Grange, 'Extract from the Narrative of an Expedition into the Naga Territory of Assam,' *JASB*, No. 90, June 1839, p. 455
29 Wilcox, R., 'Memoir of a Survey and the Neighbouring Countries, executed in 1824-6-7-8,' in *Selection of Chapters*, p. 12.
Local chiefs also drew upon lowland resources such as “modern” firearms and drifting military resources or armed militia bands. In fact, colonial frontier wars had often stepped up the availability and circulation of firearms along India’s North Eastern Frontier. In January 1846, Captain S. F. Hannay, Commanding the 1st Assam Light Infantry reports that “many Abor Naga villages on the Assam side of the great range have been burnt ... plundered, and many of the inhabitants bought and sold into slavery by the Singphos, who are enabled to overpower small villages from possessing fire-arms.” Many of these muskets had filtered into the Singpho hills in the course of the first Anglo-Burmese war of 1824-26 through the agency of the Burmese as well as the British army. One way to tame the growing power of the Singphos was by gradually arming the affected and opposing communities. Thus, considering the protection of certain Naga villages as “urgently necessary” against Singphos “aggressions,” Captain Hannay thus sought “to distribute firearms amongst them and to teach them the use of them.” For this purpose, the chiefs of the “Husack and Tukak Nagas” were informed “to send down each a smart man to Suddeya for the purpose of being instructing (sic) in the uses of the muskets and when they had learnt it they might be sent back each with ten muskets for the use of their tribes.” If arming people was framed from the official perspective of “defense”, it also seems to have served other larger purposes in the frontier. By subtly engineering and fomenting situations of “disorder” among the varied communities through the spread of firearms, the British eventually hoped to rationalize their interventions over these resource rich areas.

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30 Selection of Chapters, p. 314
31 In 1837, some Nagas on the Assam side were attacked by a party of Singphos from the Irrawady. What concerned officials like Captain Hannay was the fact that the “Nagas were without firearms,” and so “more easily mastered by the Singphos” who possessed and knew “the use of this weapon.” F&PD. 8 May 1837, 64 – 66, P.C.
32 Ibid.
On the other, hills chiefs could also derive crucial support services from what James Scott refers to as "communities of run-aways" or dissident lowland court officials who sought refuge and ended up in the hills.\textsuperscript{33} We find one such community in the Doaneahs who according to Captain Hannay presumably "are mostly escaped slaves from the Burman territories and are now at any rate in the enjoyment of freedom even amongst the Singphos and unprotected by us."\textsuperscript{34} Besides the Doaneahs, what even more surprised Captain Hannay was also the fact that among the Singphos "the confidential attendant of both the Beesa and Duffa Gaum were ... generally Ahoms."\textsuperscript{35} At other times, opposing Naga tribes would often "purchase the assistance of a few Kacharees" who reportedly roved about, "armed with muskets."\textsuperscript{36} Brown Wood, the Sub-Assistant Commissioner, in fact remarks that, "the Kacharees ... are always ready to give their assistance to the richer party" who in the process "are sure of becoming victors."\textsuperscript{37} Moreover, we also come across instances whereby hill people would often engage lowland states in their local tussle for ascendancy. Following an expedition into the Naga Hills in 1850, Lieutenant Vincent thus notes how, "in every Angami village, there were two parties, one attached to the interest of Manipur and the other to the British, but each only working for an alliance to get aid in crushing the opposite faction."\textsuperscript{38} While securing the aid of lowland regimes were often crucial in determining the outcome of the conflicts, at the same time, the hill people seem to have displayed their political ingenuity by manipulating and thus drawing the Manipur Raja and the EIC in their local conflicts to suit the political circumstances of the moment.

\textsuperscript{33} F&PD. 8 May 1837, Nos. 64 - 66, P.C.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} See Mackenzie, History of the North East Frontier, p. 112.
In this earlier phase, the interaction between the British and the hill people was also in many ways brutal and yet, a more open encounter. Thus, British officers of the 1840s would arrive with formal "treaties" addressed to the Naga "Rajahs" in the hope of securing peaceful relations, and commercial concessions. Such instances seem to convey the sense that the British perhaps recognized these "Rajahs" as rulers of "states", i.e., as established polities worthy to engage with. By entering into an alliance with such powerful figures, the British then hoped to secure rights and ease access to land, resources and territory along the frontier tracts. In September 1841, Captain T. Brodie, Principal Assistant, Governor General's Agent, reports of engaging one such powerful figure, the "Chunguye Rajah" in the Naga Hills. This Rajah, according to Brodie, was looked upon by "all the Nagas between the Dikho and Jeypore ... as their head," and they in turn paid "a tribute called chace, consisting of some grain, cloth, & c." However, privileging a particular group or individual could harden divisions within the hill communities. For instance, in 1836, apparently exasperated with the inroads made by the British "ally" Beesa Gaum on his territory, the Duffa Gaum who McCosh describe as "the most influential unfriendly chief" among the Singphos, organized a hostile incursion against him and was "threatening everyone with his vengeance who acknowledged British protection and even beheaded some who refused to his will."

At particular conjuncture, Burmese territorial moves in the region could create a context for the British to intensify its territorial claims over competing frontier areas. For in the early nineteenth century, the Ava court had its own design or project of expansion into the North Eastern Frontier. In 1840, disturbing news thus reached Calcutta about the reported intention of the Ava

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39 Jacobs, et al., p. 21; also see, 'Reports of Lieutenant Brodie's dealings with the Nagas on the Seeksagor Frontier, 1841 - 46,' in Selection of Chapters, pp. 284 – 315.
40 See, Hill Tracts between Assam and Burmah, p. 287.
41 John McCosh, 'Account of the Mountain Tribes on the Extreme N.E. Frontier of Bengal,' JASB, No. 52, April 1836.
king "to open a road to Assam through the Naga Hills from the Kyendwin [Chindwin] river." Of special concern for the Company officials was the close proximity of Burma with the tea gardens in Assam. British officials were aware that a military engagement with the Burmese would be injurious to the economic interest of the Company. More pressing for the British was to secure "a large tract of country abounding in tea tracts, excellent coal, iron ore and petroleum."43

To thwart any possible Burmese advance, British strategists sought to position military outposts at sites "most commandable" to monitor movements and closely watch rivals across strategic frontiers.44 Besides, by engaging independent States like Manipur and Tripura, British strategists created a bulwark against any possible Burmese invasion into Assam. In fact, as early 1826 the British, in order to put a "powerful check upon the Burmese Govt.", had recognized "Gumbheer Sing" as the Rajah of Manipur who was vested not only with the status of a sovereign ruler but was also allowed to maintain the "Manipur Levy" of 3000 men to be trained and equipped by the British Govt.45

Moreover, in their efforts to close off access to imperial rivals, one strategy devised by the British was to woo powerful intermediaries in the hills, such as the Singphos who previously were in the employ of the Ava King. Strategic imperatives apart, the combination of geographical location and economic potentialities of the Singphos territory also attracted colonial officials in this venture. Thus, we find one such person in Beesa Gaum, the Singpho chief, whose country the British coveted for its tea lands.46 In 1826, Beesa Gaum, the Singpho

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42 F&PD. 29 June, 1840. Nos. 109 – 111.
44 F&PD. 16 May 1838. Nos. 53 – 58, P.C.
45 Pemberton, Report on the Eastern Frontier, pp. 50, 51; also see Mackenzie, History of the Northeast, 150 - 52
46 Tea was first "discovered" in the 1820s in the Singpho country. Besides this, the Singpho territory was also situated along an important trading route which connected Assam, Burma and China. See, Mackenzie, History of the Northeast, pp. 63 - 67.
COAL LOCALITIES IN ASSAM.

1837.

Source: Accounts and Papers, Vol. XLV, East India, Session 5 February – 28 July, 1863, p. 308
Chief, was made the "paramount chief" over the other "sixteen chiefs." 47 Besides a monthly allowance of rupees 50 a month, he also served "as an organ of communication with the other chiefs and a spy upon their actions." 48 The Beesa Gaum was further persuaded to "desert his own country and live on lands" granted to him at Burhat and Jaipur. 49 In addition to this, the Beesa Gaum was charged with duties of furnishing information of anything that might occur beyond the frontier calculated to excite agitation and apprehension. 50 Such practices of wooing powerful local chiefs and placing them in a position of ascendancy indicated the gradual progression towards colonial boundary-building along the frontier.

The British policy in the North-Eastern Frontier was also as much shaped and influenced by contingent circumstances in India and other areas. For instance, during the 1840s and 50s, the watchword of the government with regard to the frontier policy in the North-East was one of "conciliation" or otherwise also popularly known as the policy of "non-interference". This was especially so at a time of financial stringency in the wake of wars with the Sikhs, in the Sind and Afghanistan. 51 Nonetheless, this policy of conciliation was unworkable when vital imperial interests were at stake. While contingent circumstances had earlier spurred the colonial authorities to engage the hill people as potential allies to counter any Burmese intrigues across the frontier, by

47 Ibid., p. 64.
49 Ibid.
50 Considering the strategic position of the Singpho country, such a measure was imperative "for the Burmese were expected daily to show themselves on the Patkoi, and early news of their advance could come to us only through the Singphos." Mackenzie, History of the Northeast, pp. 63 - 67.
the second half of the nineteenth century such a policy seem to appear rather untenable. With the gradual settlement of the “Burmese menace” by the second Anglo-Burmese war of 1852-53, the British government soon saw in the Abors, the Nagas and the Lushais etc., as no less potential enemies. Such a view received added impetus especially around the 1850s and 70s when a series of frictions arose between the planters and the hill peoples regarding “boundaries, rent and tribute”. Such disquieting situations, often referred to in the colonial lexicon as “raids”, spurred the British to frame measures which would make more explicit their claims over these territories; these spaces were then delineated into spheres of influence even as the colonial state ensured that local populations followed these new realities.

The Inner Line Regulation

Unregulated movement of people and commodities could often keep the frontier porous, blurring the state’s authority and territoriality. However, at particular conjunctures, it could precipitate the setting up of “harder” borders through what Mahnaz Ispahani calls the antiroute. In the context of the North-Eastern Frontier, the antiroute took the form of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873, by which lines were drawn between the hills and the plains. Explaining the purpose of the Inner Line to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, the Officiating Deputy Commissioner of Sibsagar remarked that:

the object of the Inner Line is to fix a limit by confining a person within which Government may, in well segregating its subject from those of

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adjoining foreign countries, avoid the complications that frequently arises from incautious enterprise of its people amongst less civilized races.\textsuperscript{54}

This regulation thus empowered the Lieutenant Governor "to prescribe a line, to be called 'the inner line' in each or any of the districts affected, beyond which no British subject of certain classes of foreign residents can pass without a license."\textsuperscript{55} Framing such a strategy was crucial for by the 1860s and 70s, the opening up of a series of plantations and coalmines along the foothills had inspired British investors to buy shares in these lucrative holdings, putting increased pressure on the colonial government to cement its grip on the hills and ensure order along these resource rich, yet, "unstable" peripheries.\textsuperscript{56} Through the invention of the Inner Line British policy planners thus sought to fence off the fledgling plantations and coal mines dotting the foothills from the marauding "wild tribes" protesting their dispossession.\textsuperscript{57} Furthermore, such process goes on to show how the creation of the frontier was as much intertwined with the interests of the private capitalist and speculators.

In order to authorize and regulate movement in the frontier, it was also crucial for the colonial state to map and make sense of an unfamiliar and confusing frontier landscape.\textsuperscript{58} As such, a series of explorations and surveys were set in motion in the 1870s to define the Inner Line on the ground.\textsuperscript{59} And by

\textsuperscript{54} Nagaland State Archives (henceforth NSA), Inner Line Files, No. 115, 1875
\textsuperscript{55} Alexander Mackenzie, History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal (Calcutta: Home Department Press, 1884), pp. 55 - 56.
\textsuperscript{56} Representations were often made to the Assam administration by alarmed British investors on the existing "uncontrolled violence" in the frontier. For instance, following a "raid" on the Baladhan tea garden, Messrs Octavius Steel & Co., nervously wrote to the Assam Chief Commissioner explaining that such "depredations" was "calculated to fill with anxiety and apprehensions the many capitalist whose valuable interests lie ... within easy reach of marauding tribes from the hostile Naga territory adjoining, .... Unless something can be done to demonstrate the security of their gardens from the like danger, the value of such properties is certain to be seriously depreciated." Proceedings of the Chief Commissioner of Assam, Foreign Department, February 1881; FPP - Revenue A, July 1872, Nos. 13 - 26
\textsuperscript{57} Mackenzie, History of the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{58} F&PD - A, May 1872, Nos. 16 - 34
\textsuperscript{59} F&PD - A, May 1875, Nos. 98 - 100; FPP - A, November 1875, Nos. 44- 45.
1875 colonial officials seemed to have delineated the Inner Line to a large extent which were generally based along embankments, foot paths, watersheds, the base of the mountains and other natural boundaries. For instance, H. Luttman-Johnson, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam describes the Inner Line on the Lakhimpur District as follows: “In one part it is an embankment, in another part a patrol-path, and in other parts it follows the course of the well known rivers.” While these markers came to inscribe a new “border” in this region, yet the Inner Line was always flexible, fluid and shifting; for the Inner Line was constantly being pressed outwards into the hills as and when it was found convenient for the state either to bring in new covetous and resource rich areas under its control. For instance, while in July 1880, the Inner line in the south Sibsagar district was pushed forward towards the Naga Hills “to include areas suitable for cultivation ... of tea or cereals [and] valuable forests lands”. In July 1884, the proposal to push the Inner Line further into the interior of the Lakhimpur district was aimed to bring the rich coal bearing tracts operated by the Assam Railway Trading Company in the Naga Hills within the Inner Line.

On the one hand, the hills were supposed to secure a borderland for empire, but it was one that was constantly being pressed outwards. From this perspective,

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60 Rev. A, October 1874, Nos. 15-16; Rev. A, October 1874, Nos. 16 - 17; FPP - A, May 1875, Nos. 98 – 100; FPP - A, August 1875, Nos. 393 – 394.
61 F&PD – Pol. A, September 1875, nos. 269 – 272. In the case of the Cachar District, the Inner Line ran along the “ridge of the western branch of the Rengti Pahar, as far as the source of the Jalinga; then along the Jalinga river to the south-east corner of the Sonacherra grant; and along the eastern boundaries of Sonacherra and Nowarband grants to a point where the police road meets the latter. Thence it follows the police road to the Rukini river and then runs in a south-easterly direction to the western boundary of the Monierkhal grant; and follows the west and south boundaries of that grant to the River Sonai, along which it runs to the north to the opening of the police road to Mainadahar, which it follows to the western boundary of that grant. It then turns along the west and south boundaries of Mainadahar grant to the river Barak.” F&PD (Political)-A, July1878, Nos. 30 - 32
63 NSA, Sl. No. 115, 1884. In January 1889, a proposal was further put forward by the Officiating Secretary to the Commissioner of Assam to the Secretary, Govt of India to modify the Inner Line of Sibsagar by including certain lands in the Mokokchung sub-division within the Sibsagar District. The reason stated was that “the area was found suitable for tea and other cultivation and various applications for it had been received by the Government from time to time.”
the policy was one of drawing “wild savage tribes” into the fold of empire. Looking downwards to the lowlands, the policy was then one of exclusion by “internal” demarcation.

Yet, this policy of pushing the line into the hills was not often easily appreciated within the administration. In January 1881, S. O. B. Ridsdale, Officiating Commissioner of Assam Valley Districts, expressed his objection to the Secretary, Chief Commissioner of Assam on the tangible working of the inner line. Ridsdale argued that such a policy would further remove the inner line from control as “the police posts placed to watch it will be so much isolated that communications will be very difficult to maintain and it will be impossible to adequately check and supervise their proceedings.” Nonetheless, such cases of objection were often regarded as “insignificant” especially in a context of politico-resource related pressure and concomitant commercial interest of the empire. A notification published in the 1884 Gazette of India thus indicates the possibility of such an endless shifting and drawing of lines in the frontier: “the outer line is purposely left indefinite so that we can advance the Inner Line to any extent circumstances may render necessary.”

Crossing the Lines

If drawing lines between the “hills” and the “plains” formed an integral part of the colonial bordering practices, new “tools” sought to reinforce this demarcation. The colonial logic behind the employment of such technology was that the Inner Line “should be a line, which no one can cross without knowing it.” Yet, any such possibility appears to be quite an overwhelming task especially in a 19th century context where resources of the state were

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64 NSA, Sl. 123, 1899, Legislative Department.
65 The “outer line” according to the Gazette of India determined the limits of British jurisdiction “over which we claim some sort of sovereignty, but exercise no jurisdiction and work by personnel influence only.” NSA, Sl. No. 115.
66 NSA, Sl. 116, 1875, Political – A; F&PD – Pol. A, September 1875, nos. 269 – 272
overstretched along a 3000 miles long frontier. What rather seems to be happening, as we shall see below, is a possible colonial dilemma in the margins where such practices were being enforced.

Following the introduction of the Inner Line Regulation all British subjects, including the people in the hills were restricted from crossing the inner line without a pass or permit. In other words, through this Inner Line, mobility was restricted and access regulated between the hills and the plains "by penal sanctions and a system of pass." The introduction of passes also indicated the legal manifestation of a gradually evolving "border". In that sense, applying for a pass thereby certified the existence of a "legitimate boundary" and (un)consciously forced the hill people as well as lowland subjects to accept the inner line as the border. Further, police outposts located along the foothills became crucial points in enforcing the system of passes in the frontier. For instance, C.A. Elliott, the Commissioner of Assam informs us that "the Angami Nagas who come to trade in Lakhimpur show their passes here [Baladhan police post]." The police manning the outposts were further ordered to "report or detain any suspicious cases of Nagas or Kukis coming without passes." The imposition of the inner line on an unsuspecting population through the varied state institutions and structures could therefore change the meaning of everyday movement in the locality.

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68 Mackenzie, History of the Northeast Frontier, p. 514.
69 Ibid., p. 516.
A register was further maintained at the police outposts “showing the number of persons who have passed towards the plains.” Further, this Register was to record the following details:

| Date (i.e., date when party reports on its way to the plains). |
| Tribe to which party belongs. |
| Village from which party come. |
| Name of the head of party. |
| Number of persons composing party. |
| Place to which going. |
| Object of Journey. |
| If Angami Nagas number of pass given at Kohima and copy of particulars given in it. If hill people from North Cachar number of passes given by head constable. |
| Date of return on homeward journey. |

Table 1. Sample Form of an Inner Line Permit

Such documentation was then deemed crucial so as to make the hill people more “legible” to the government.71

Moreover, by equating territory with a people colonial practices also created territorial regulations “by proscribing or prescribing specific activities

70 Ibid
71 For better efficiency amongst the frontier officials, the Chief Commissioner further ordered the District Superintendent of the various districts to communicate with the District Superintendent, Naga Hills “to see if the number of passes given by him corresponds with the number of Angamis visiting the plains.” Ibid.
within spatial boundaries." In other words, delineating how and by whom areas or spaces in the frontier can be used and accessed. For instance, lowlanders were now prevented from "cutting wood, hunting animals, trading in arms and ammunition, collecting wax, Indian-rubber, ivory and other jungle products" inside the hills tracts. Yet, despite such legal strictures varied actors continued to travel across the frontier with or without the knowledge of the colonial officials. One such group, which attracted the attention of the Assam Administration were the Nepalese. In October 1884, H. C. Williams, the D. C. of Darrang informed the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam that large numbers of Nepalese had "in the last two or three years crossed the frontier without passes for the purposes of cutting rubber." What concerned Williams was the fact that "the different tribes have at different times, complained of the injuries their rubber-trees have suffered at the hands of people from the plains." At the same time Williams reports that, "when they [Nepalese] get here they are practically independent as they sell their services to the best offer, get rubber whence they can and go off again." Moreover, to Williams the "paucity of police" rendered the possibility of their "being taken red-handed across the frontier" and "they not having local habitation, the chance of subsequent discovery and punishment still less." Alternate measures such as stopping the influx of Nepalese from the west or refusing passes to Nepalese rubber-tappers were suggested. Despite these complications, not all hill people seemed to have opposed the entry of the Nepalese into the hills. The Hazarikhoa Akas, for instance, knew well the importance of drawing upon the useful services of the

72 Vandergeest, et al., p. 388;
74 Assam State Archive (henceforth ASA), Chief Commissioner Proceedings, Foreign Department, December 1884
75 Ibid.
Nepalese. Thus, in November 1884, the Hazarikhoa Akas “put in a petition asking for 500 Nepalese to be allowed to cross the frontier to cut rubber.” 76

Colonial dilemma with regard to the operation of the inner line was also as much evident in their attempt to define the authorship over access to natural resources in the frontier. For instance, colonial officials like Steuart Bayly, Secretary in the Revenue and Agricultural Department, were quite confused about the legality of the regulation and its implication on the elephant mahals of the Zamindars in the Garo Hills. 77 Even more bothersome to the British officials was the fact that elephants from the government held tracts would often “stray” into the Zamindars’ mahals, which were eventually captured by the Zamindars; the mahals being a space in which the revenues derived from “the capture and sale of the elephants” formed the sole rights of the Zamindars. Thus, C.J. Lyall, the Officiating Secretary to the Commissioner of Assam wrote, “it is impossible to prove that a roaming beast like a wild elephant does not ‘inhabit’ the jungle where he happen to be caught.” 78

Despite the colonial surveillance mechanisms to regulate mobility along the frontier, the state apparatus was frequently being ruptured by the local people as well as by varied other agents operating in the region. Dodging the military posts, the Nagas continued to infiltrate the plains, either to trade or to directly attack the British plantations and settlements. 79 Hill people also continued to defy colonial power by refusing to seek permission to move across the “border.” At other times, “slaves” escaping from the control of hill chief’s or

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76 Ibid. This demand was reduced to 200 men by H. C. Williams, D. C. of Darrang, provided the approval from the Chief Commissioner of Assam, and with the kotokies “being responsible for the people who go.”
77 Ibid
78 These elephant mahals have reportedly been the assets of the Zamindars since the permanent settlement and where they had “the right of the Zamindars to capture elephants.” Ibid.
79 As late as 1880, a British official expressed his bewilderment as to how the Angami Nagas “could pass unmolested through the Kutchta Naga and Kuki country passing our outpost in North Cachar to attack the Baladhan tea estate.” F&PD - A. March 1880. Nos. 331 – 395 D.
families would often cross the lines and seek refuge in the British territory. In that sense, the inner line continued to be appropriated by non-state as well as state actors with varied concerns and agendas. As in other similar frontier contexts, the people could also make regular use of the border to escape punishment from the state, for headhunting, tax evasion etc. Moreover, commodities such as India-rubber, firearms and opium, which were deemed as “illegal” by the colonial state flowed in an unhindered fashion along the North-Eastern Frontier.

Policing the “border”

The new spatial orientation along the North Eastern Frontier, conceptualised in the Inner Line Regulation began to be enforced by institutions such as the police armed forces, and local militias. Initially, a series of 50 frontier outposts were established along routes used by the hill people when leaving their hills “to trade or raid below.” The maintenance of such outposts was a significant development in the British policy. Perhaps, a trick borrowed from their Ahom predecessors. These outposts not only sought to ensure the permanent posting of troops to dangerous outlying areas, equally important was the fact that British officers could keep essential commodities such as salt, from going up the hills by blockading the routes or duars in the foothills. Moreover, as Captain L. W. Shakespear remarked, the establishment of these outposts “was found to be the

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80 In 1885, Tater, an Abor slave along with a free Abor woman Lawyoom and Tanyang escaped from the Abor country and sought refuge in British territory. When some of the Abor villagers demanded their surrender the secretary to the Chief Commissioner rejected their plea on the ground that “such surrender is clearly impossible” on British territory. See ASA, Proceedings of the Chief Commissioner of Assam, foreign Department, 1885.


82 FPP – Revenue A. July 1872, Nos. 13 – 26; F&PD - A, August 1877, Nos. 310 - 318 A; F&PD – A. September 1876, Nos. 143.

83 Outposts were set up at Boropathar, Mohan Dijao, Dimapur, Mahurukh, Hosang Hajoo, Guillon, Gumai, Gunjong, Baladhan, Jhirighat, Jaipur, Hangrung, Maibung, and Asaloo etc. See L.W. Shakespear, History of the Assam Rifles, pp. 8 – 9.
only way of impressing on the Nagas with ideas of law and order.” In other words, such outposts began to be conceptualised as pushing the administration deeper into a “turbulent” frontier. Patrol paths were constructed between the chains of outposts to ensure troop mobility along the frontier. These outposts were garrisoned by men largely enlisted from the Nepalese, Kacharis, Rabhas and Muslims, Garos, Kamptis, Khasis, Nagas, Kukis, Mikirs, Bhutias, besides Assamese of various castes in the five valley districts, and Bengalis in the districts of Sylhet and Cachar. About one-fifth of this total force was composed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hill Tribes in Police Force</th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goorkhas</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kukis</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garos</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamptis</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khasis</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutias</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikirs</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
<td><strong>571</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


85 Assam Administration Report for 1874-75 & 1875-76
Yet, British resources in the frontier were often found to be hopelessly overstretched. Often the available forces in the frontier were found either engaged in punitive expeditions, or occupied in repairing roads and transporting rations to their isolated outposts, and provisioning and maintaining these posts proved "troublesome and expensive business." In fact, as early as in 1872, Colonel Hopkinson, the Chief Commissioner of Assam had remarked that the police force engaged to watch the frontier "cost five times more than it did eighteen years ago, while disturbances are more frequent than then." Further, the location of the outposts in isolated and unhealthy positions often meant frequent reports of high casualty among the native troops. In fact, the initial scheme of engaging detachments of Hindustanis and Punjabis was found erroneous and had to be abandoned. "Neither the Hindustanis nor the Punjabis thrive in the climate nor are they well adapted for jungle work." In one instance Alexander Mackenzie remarks: "the deaths alone in the 5th Madras Infantry since it went to the Kubo valley have numbered two British officers and upwards of 110 rank and file, and in the 28th Madras Infantry one British officer (the colonel) and upwards of 70 rank and file." Such prevailing conditions meant that few resources were often left over for border surveillance and interdiction. The rigours of the climate, the difficulties of communication and the caste prejudices of the Hindustanis thus created a context on the necessity to increasingly depend on the services of irregulars for policing the frontier.

Even as local levy's such as the Manipur Levy, Kachari Levy, the Doaneah Levy etc., were being effectively used to police the frontier, by 1882-83 the British armed forces in the frontier also underwent drastic changes with both an

87 Mackenzie, p. 498.
88 F&PD – May 1872, Nos. 16 – 34.
89 Mackenzie, p. 501.
90 Foreign Department Report on Chin – Lushai Hills, September 1892 (Aizawl: Firma KLM 1980; 1892)
increase in strength (from 2400 to 3300 of all ranks) and reorganization. Such an overhauling of the armed forces conjunctured at a moment when Anglo-Burmese relations deteriorated, indicating the possibility of an imminent collision in upper Burma. By the early 1880s, reports of French intrigues in upper Burma had already alarmed Calcutta, especially considering its consequent danger to British commercial interest. What's more, the die seems to have been cast with the signing of the Franco-Burmese Treaty on 15 January 1885, a reportedly "secret" agreement by which France was to supply arms to the Ava king through Tongking. Thus, a revamping of British military resources was crucial to not only to keep a check on bellicose frontier tribes but also to enable resources to be diverted simultaneously to meet impending imperial contingencies against imperial rivals across the frontier.

Organized under a more proper military system new battalions arranged territorially such as the Naga Hills Military Police Battalion, Lakhimpur and Surma valley Battalion etc., took shape by early 1883. All outposts were revised with proper barrack accommodation, a focus on improvement in health management of the soldiers, while rifle ranges and parade grounds were made where possible. A network of military stockades and forts were further built across the North-Eastern Frontier even as by the early twentieth century, improvement in armaments and the use of technologies such as telegraph and signaling came to enhance policing along the frontier.

Yet, the armed force was not the only weapon utilized by the state to control order and movement along the border. To supplement the colonial military requirements, settlement strategies served to initiate a new policy of "ethnic bordering" in the frontier. These settlements were often implanted in the

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91 Frontier and Overseas Expeditions from India, Vol. V (Simla: Government Monotype Press, 1907), pp. 113 - 126
92 Shakespear, pp. 55 – 57.
vicinity of military stations, or otherwise, along the routes frequented by "troublesome" hill communities. For instance, "in 1856 – 57, lands were assigned rent free for 10 and afterwards for 25 years to any Kookies who would settle to the east of North Cachar beyond the Langting River." Apart from this sweetened offer, "firearms and ammunition were given them (sic) by Government." Thus, by 1859, writes Alexander Mackenzie, "about 600 Kookies had accepted free settlement on these terms." Interestingly, the Angamis are reported to avoid these villages and as such, "the country in the rear of the Kookie settlements was free from incursions." Likewise, it was from such communities that the British derived crucial military resources in the frontier. Organized into a hundred strong militia, Mackenzie thus describes the Kukis as a hardworking and self-reliant race: "the only hillmen in this quarter who can hold their own against the Angamis." Using bows and arrows, instead of spears, "they were much respected by the Angamis." In the colonial scheme of things, these Kuki settlements were then strategically created to serve as, "a buffer or screen between our more timid subjects and the Angamis."94

In the meantime, by the 1880s, Nepalese settlements, among others, were being initiated gradually along the Naga Hills and the Daffla Hills. Brought around mainly from Darjeeling, these settled Nepalese were primarily engaged in clearing of paths, jungles, and constructing roads around military stations.95 At other times, settlements were encouraged, as in the case of the Mikirs, to "serve as a link between British territory and the Western Daffla communities."96

94 See Mackenzie, History of the North East Frontier, p. 146. While British settlement strategies sought to contain the more "warlike tribes", perhaps it is in strategies such as this that some of the earliest seeds of messy discords among the varied hill communities were sown.
95 ASA, Chief Commissioner Proceedings, Foreign Department, 1884; F&PD – A. June 1882. Nos. 134-137
96 Ibid. "The Mikirs", writes E. Stack, Officiating secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam in 1884, "are a tribe inhabiting the low hills along the southern borders of the Nowgong district and the eastern part of Kamrup." What attracted the attention of Stack towards the Mikirs was the fact that "they are a quite, inoffensive race and have never given trouble either to the native rulers of Assam or to the British governments."
Considering the loose hold of the empire at its peripheries, these settled communities then came to constitute crucial auxiliary support bases to meet the varied frontier contingencies of the empire in the frontier.

**Boundary Formation and its Changing Context**

Even as British influence gradually expanded throughout the nineteenth century, colonial officials often complained of the impossibility of getting the Government to give any attention to the North-Eastern Frontier, that Government being wholly occupied with the North-West Frontier and the danger of Russian aggression through Afghanistan and the Khyber Pass. In a dispatch to Sir Mortimer Durand, Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department on 15th August 1892, Sir C. A. Elliott, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal thus anxiously presses for the attention of the Government on the Chin-Lushai affairs: "You must be very busy with North-Western Frontier affairs. Do not neglect our wants which though less important are still serious." Yet, such dispatches hardly drew any serious attention of the Government. In fact, the existing official attitude of the government of India towards the North-Eastern Frontier is best captured in the words of John L. Christian: "The condition of the Northeastern frontier caused no Governor General a single sleepless night."

Such a lackadaisical attitude was compounded with the haphazard working of colonial authority, which was often found to straddle across varied territorial patterns along the frontier. For instance, R. G. Woodthorpe of the Intelligence Branch remarked as to how, "The Chin-Lushai files abound in instances of difficulties having been caused by the three governments of Bengal, Assam and Burma having jurisdiction in these hills." As a result, Woodthorpe nervously remarked that, "In 1889 the Lushais could not be dealt with by Assam

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97 John L. Christian, 'Anglo-French Rivalry in Southeast Asia.'
98 Foreign Department Report on Chin – Lushai Hills, September 1892 (Aizaw: Firma KLM 1980; 1892), p. 95
99 Christian, 'Anglo-French Rivalry in Southeast Asia.'
as usual, because the force advancing under General Tregear was acting from Bengal”. At the same time, it is interesting to note how local people understood the challenges the British faced and tried to manipulate the situation to their own advantage. For instance, Woodthorpe reports how, “during the expedition of 1889-90, the Chins were quick enough to perceive that our Generals were working under different orders, and they could not help playing them off one against the other with a certain amount of success, as our knowledge of the country and its inhabitants was very limited, and careful enquiry should have preceded any decision as to jurisdiction.”

By the turn of the 20th century, the northern frontier areas bordering Tibet, occupied by the Akas, the Dafflas, Abors, Miris and Mishmis etc., increasingly attracted the attention of the British Government. Located on the empire’s outer edge these areas were what Curzon called the “advanced strategical frontier.” These were territories that were technically independent but it was the task of imperial diplomacy and military power to ensure that they serve as buffers for the British Empire. Anxiety over a possible Russian hold over Tibet spurred the British to dispatch official delegates to Lhasa who had as their primary purpose the inquiry into the extent of Russian influence in Tibet. A case in point is the much celebrated Colonel Younghusband mission to Tibet in 1904. Lord Curzon had ostensibly sanctioned this mission with the aim to counter or prevent any Russian intrigues from across Tibet into the eastern frontiers.

Following the conclusion of the Younghusband expedition, the Lhasa Convention of 1904 placed the British in a firmer position to establish their political control over Tibet. However, by 1907, political exigencies pushed the

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100 Ibid., p. 96
101 Text of the 1907 Romanes Lecture on the subject of Frontiers by Lord Curzon of Kedleston, Viceroy of India (1898-1905) and British Foreign Secretary 1919-24 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 27
102 Francis Younghusband, India and Tibet (London: John Murray, 1910)
British to enter into the Anglo-Russian Convention. The Dalai Lama, having escaped from Lhasa during the Younghusband mission, had dispatched his "indispensable" envoy Dorjeiff who soon reached the court of the Russian Czar. Wary of the consequences arising from any possible alliance resulting from such a maneuver by the Dalai Lama, the British swiftly moved in to seal the agreement to forestall any Russian influence over Tibet. Under this Convention, the British were now required to work through the intermediary of China for any future interference or negotiations with Tibet.103

Finding the British much "disabled" through this convention, the Chinese were not slow to exploit the situation. Thus, in 1910, the Chinese territorial moves under Chao Erh-Feng soon overran Eastern Tibet even as the Dalai Lama took flight and sought refuge in British India. Following the Chinese surge in Tibet, it was not long before Chinese troops appeared in Rima where Tungao, a Mishmi chief, was ordered to cut a road between Tibet and Assam. This was soon followed by sending "emissaries" amongst the Mishmis, "to secure their submission."104 This sudden intrusion of the Chinese along the northern borderlands of the British India rudely awakened British officials to the threat of a new power along its frontiers. Thus, Archibald Rose in 1912 anxiously remarked: "She [China] has carried her arms to the sacred city of Lhasa, has driven the Buddha incarnate with but little ceremony from his spiritual throne, and has even asserted claims over Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim which have attracted the attention of the world."105

Even as officials expressed apprehensions on the vulnerability of its northern borders, events were rapidly unfolding in the region. The collapse of

103 Ibid., pp. 376 – 78; 444, 445
the Manchus in the wake of the October Chinese revolution of 1911 had emboldened the Tibetans to rebel and subsequently expel the Chinese troops from Lhasa. Such markedly sweeping political changes in the neighborhood thus provided much needed room for the British to maneuver their strategy of delimiting the Sino-Indian boundary. Accordingly, in 1913, Sir Arthur Henry McMahon, the Indian Foreign Secretary, hosted a tripartite conference in the form of the Simla Convention by inviting the Tibetan and Chinese representatives to address the question of its northern boundary. Desultory negotiations took place over the next few months till by 1914 a tentative agreement emerged. Accordingly, the Simla Conference not only recognized both Tibetan autonomy and Chinese suzerainty, concomitantly it also established a line, commonly known as the McMahon Line, on the crest of the Himalayas as the international frontier between India and China.106

Nonetheless, the British triumph over the conclusion of a long drawn boundary negotiation was rather short lived. In fact, even before the ink of their treaty with China had dried, Peking out rightly refused to ratify the Treaty calling the McMahon Line as “an illegal line”. One reason why China did not respond to the treaty was Britain’s refusal to allow Peking suzerain rights over Tibet. Any attempt to salvage this settlement became impossible as within days after its conclusion, McMahon the principal architect “left the Indian shores never to return.”107 Moreover, within weeks followed the outbreak of the First World War; with Britain engaged in pressing issues on the war front, the McMahon Line soon became “a matter of remote concern to the Government in London and Delhi.” Such apathy was also compounded by the view among the

British policy makers that China would at worst be a source of annoyance, not a threat. Nonetheless, rapidly shifting global contexts around the 1930s and 40s would not only draw the attention of the British to this crucial treaty, it would further thrust the North-Eastern Frontier into a new phase of boundary making, one where the varied interest of competing imperial powers would come to collide with and shape the spaces of the frontier people.

"The Mongolian Fringe"\textsuperscript{108}

In the 1930s and 40s, increased political tensions by way of nationalist movements, both in India and Burma, and the second world war highlighted the political and military value of the mountainous area. In fact, by the late 1930s, the British had moved resolutely to establish "protected areas," "excluded areas," and "partially excluded areas," over the mountainous areas between India and Burma.\textsuperscript{109} This was partly aimed to preempt any "nationalist" (Burmese or Indians) claim over the hills and to counter any nationalist influence in these areas or what the British came to see as the "political innocence."\textsuperscript{110}

Meanwhile, the Second World War had rudely awakened the British policy planners to the significance of the region in the defense of the empire. Writing at the close of the war, Sir Olaf Caroe, the Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, remarked in 1944: "The North-East Frontier on land has at last been seen as a vital sector of India's defence, and Burma with the countries beyond to be as much a buffer state of India's security as were ever Afghanistan,

\textsuperscript{108} "The Mongolian Fringe", memorandum by Caroe, 18 January 1940, See India Office Library (hereafter IOR), L/P&S/12/725

\textsuperscript{109} For instance, the "Excluded Areas" included the North East Frontier Tract (Sadiya, Baliapara, and Lakhimpur), The Naga Hills District, The Lushai Hills District, The North Cachar Hills Subdivision of the Cachar Dist., while the "Partially Excluded Areas" consisted of, The Garo Hills Dist; The Mlkor Hills (in the Nowgong, and Sibsagar Dist); The British portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, other than the Shillong Municipality and Cantonment. IOR L/P&S/12/3115A; Robert Reid, History of Frontier Areas.

Persia or Iraq." In the calculus of British planners like Caroe, the Assam frontier subsequently came to constitute a strategic land cordon or "The inner wall" in the future defense of India. In considering scenarios for future wars, Caroe further saw "these territories [as] admirably placed and suited for the cantoning of land and air forces." Such a move was also seen as a possible measure to balance the growing American hegemony in the region.

Considering these strategic imperatives, plans were set on foot to convert these territories into a "Crown Agency under the direct supervision of the governor-general in Delhi." Considering the growing likelihood of a transfer of power based on a partition of the region, these measures however seemed increasingly irrelevant.

Conclusion

In the meantime, varied practices of the state would seek to strengthen the new geographical arrangements in the region. Ranging from infrastructural developments to taxation regimes, as well as the 'disciplining' of the local population sought to place the state in a more firmer control of its eastern frontier. At the same time, these state projects could also produce different or uncertain results often contradicting the intention of the rulers, one where the subject people appropriated these impositions in a variety of ways to pursue their varied agendas. Thus, the flows of undesirable or "dangerous commodities" like firearms could progressively undermine the colonial strategy of territoriality as we shall see in the next chapter.

112 According to Caroe, this inner wall came to "consists of a series of tribes or minor States from the Persian frontier around the perilous north west to Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and the Assam frontiers." See, "Whither India's Foreign Policy?" memorandum by Olaf Caroe on 26 April 1942, IOR L/P&S/12/725.
113 Ibid
114 Ibid
Conjunctures of violence, territoriality and spatial production then came to increasingly reshape access to and control over agrarian and political resources. These interactions, processes and practices then came to play a significant role in shaping and orienting the frontier spaces and communities. Having said so, it is also important to note that, the significance of colonial boundary-making practices did not necessarily wane during the twentieth century. Rather, states would continue to employ these strategies conveniently in a variety of settings as and when it suited their interest and agendas.